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AUTHOR	Sturges, Jack; Yarbrough, Roy D.
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine whether there was an association between the amount of formal social work education completed and ability of students to judge the degree of appropriateness of proposed solutions to problems frequently encountered in social work practice, and secondarily to determine whether students' judgments of problem solutions were similar to those of expert practitioners. The instrument used to obtain was the Social Work Practice Problems Inventory, which consists of 26 statements of problem situations similar to those often encountered by social workers. The analysis of data revealed that the students, irrespective of amount of formal social work education, were in general agreement about the degree of appropriateness of problem solutions but that there was substantial disagreement between the students and the practitioners. The statistically significant differences between the two groups were largely attributable to the students' tendency to rate the solutions as less appropriate than did the practitioners. Reasons suggested to account for the differences between two groups include inexperience on the part of students in dealing with similar problems, a tendency for students to be critical of less than ideal solutions, and a lack of formal educational experiences designed to improve the students' problem-solving skills. The questionnaire is included in the appendix. Statistical tables accompany the text. (Author/PG)

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ABILITY OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS TO DETERMINE THE APPROPRIATENESS OF SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

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Prepared by:

Jack Sturges
Roy D. Yarbrough
College of Social Professions
University of Kentucky
April 1975

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ABSTRACT

The general purpose of this study was to determine whether there was an association between amount of formal social work education completed and ability of students to judge the degree of appropriateness of proposed solutions to problems frequently encountered in social work practice, and secondarily to determine whether students' judgments of problem solutions were similar to those of expert practitioners. The assumptions underlying the research included the following: (a) that there is an association between students' ability to identify the appropriateness of problem-solving behavior in hypothetical situations and their ability to engage in appropriate problem-solving behavior in actual practice situations, and (b) that an ability to use problem-solving skills is a prerequisite for entry into social work practice.

The instrument used to obtain data was the *Social Work Practice Problems Inventory* (SWPPI) which consists of 26 statements of problem situations similar to those often encountered by social workers. Each problem is followed by a solution, that is, a description of what the social worker did in the situation, and the respondent is asked to rate the appropriateness of solution as either "Appropriate," "Partially Appropriate" or "Inappropriate." Responses to the SWPPI by 16 expert practitioners, 27 graduate and 123 undergraduate social work students provided the research data.

The analysis of data revealed that the students, irrespective of amount of formal social work education, were in general agreement about the degree of appropriateness of the problem solutions but that there was substantial disagreement between the students and the practitioners. The statistically significant differences between the two groups were largely attributable to the students' tendency to rate the solutions as less appropriate than did the practitioners. Reasons suggested to account for the differences between two groups include inexperience on the part of students in dealing with similar problems, a tendency for students to be critical of less than ideal solutions and lack of formal educational experiences designed to improve the students' problem-solving skills.

The proportions of the groups rating the SWPPI problem solutions as either appropriate, partially appropriate, or inappropriate are reported. Chi-square values are also reported. The SWPPI is included as an appendix.

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ABILITY OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS TO DETERMINE THE APPROPRIATENESS OF SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

Introduction

The emphasis on the preparation of undergraduate students for direct and immediate entry into professional social work practice has generated considerable discussion about the kinds of skills and knowledge students need for practice. While there is some agreement as to what these skills and knowledge should be (Brennen and Arkava, 1974; CSWE 1962, 1967, 1971a, 1971b; McPheeters and Ryan, 1971; Reichert, 1970), less attention has been devoted to an examination of the methods to be used in determining the degree to which students possess the necessary skills and knowledge.

Most, if not all, of the traditional indices of competence, skill and knowledge are less than optimally effective measures of students' readiness for practice. Course grades, which are the most widely used measure, are subject to contamination by a variety of factors. The number of courses completed is a measure of progress toward completion of degree requirements, but may not be a useful measure of anything else. The various standardized tests such as the CAT, ACT, CEEB and GRE may provide useful measures of the quality of students' prior educational experiences and permit predictions about their future performance; they do not, however, provide measures of readiness for social work practice. There is, therefore, a need for additional and more direct measures of the degree to which social work students who have completed differing amounts of formal education actually possess the skills and knowledge necessary for professional practice.

The research reported here was based on the belief that problem-solving skill is one of the necessary elements of effective practice. This paper presents the results of an investigation which employed a measure of problem-solving skills to determine the effect of formal social work education on the ability of students to identify the degree of appropriateness of proposed solutions to problems similar to those frequently encountered in social work practice.

Definition of Problem-Solving Skill

For purposes of the study, the following descriptive definition of problem-solving skill was used.

Skill in the solving of problems is a learned ability involving both perceptual and cognitive elements and requires that the "problem solver" be able to draw upon, integrate and synthesize

previously acquired didactic and experiential knowledge to select the best solution from the options available.

This definition contains all that can be confidently asserted about the nature of skill in problem solving; namely, that it (a) is a learned skill, (b) involves a combination of perception and cognition, (c) represents a fusion of knowledge derived from formal education and experience, and (d) requires the selection of a plan of action consistent with the available information and other salient considerations.

Assumptions

The general assumptions underlying the research were (a) an ability to use problem-solving skills is a prerequisite for entry into social work practice, (b) social work education programs should provide students with experiences which allow them to acquire skills in problem solving, (c) there is an association between students' ability to identify the appropriateness of problem-solving behavior in hypothetical situations and their ability to engage in appropriate problem-solving behavior in actual practice situations, and (d) skill in problem solving can be measured under essentially standardized conditions.

Methodology

Sample

In order to obtain data relevant to the purpose of the research, an inventory developed as a measure of skill in problem solving was administered to 123 undergraduate and 27 graduate students enrolled in the College of Social Professions, University of Kentucky. Two groups of undergraduate students participated in the research. One group consisted of 60 freshmen or first-semester sophomores who had completed either none or less than one-third of the required courses. The second group of undergraduates consisted of 63 seniors who had completed most of their educational program including at least 8 credit hours in a supervised educational practicum. The graduate students were enrolled in either the first or third semester of their graduate study.

In addition, to assess the combined effects of formal education and practice experience on problem-solving skills, data reported by Torre (1972, pp. 86-97) for a sample of 16 practitioners with advanced professional degrees and extensive practice experience were used to provide normative or baseline data to permit comparisons of students' responses with those of "expert" judges.

Instrumentation

The instrument used to obtain data was the *Social Work Practice Problems Inventory* (SWPPI) which is a minor modification of an instrument developed and reported by Torre (1972, 1974). This instrument is included as an appendix. The SWPPI is a paper-and-pencil inventory that purports to measure ability to discriminate among levels of appropriateness of proposed solutions to a selection of problems typical of those encountered in social work practice. The SWPPI consists of 26 items that contain descriptions of problem situations frequently encountered by social workers. Each problem is followed by a proposed solution, that is, a description of what the social worker did or proposed to do in the situation. The respondent is asked to rate the appropriateness of the solution as either "Appropriate," "Partially Appropriate," or "Inappropriate." Of the 26 SWPPI items, eight present problems involving individuals and families, eight present problems involving small groups, eight items describe problems involving community persons and groups, and two items represent problems involving students' readiness to assume responsibility for their own learning. Torre (1972, pp. 72-102) reports acceptable reliability and validity indexes for the SWPPI.

The SWPPI also appears to have construct validity in that it requires the respondent to proceed through a series of logical steps (Ausubel, 1968; Dewey, 1910; Gagne, 1966, pp. 138-139; Guilford, 1967, pp. 312-345) to make a rating of appropriateness of the solutions to the presented problems. The respondent must (a) recognize the problem, (b) analyze the problem, (c) search for possible solutions, and (d) test the solutions. Dewey (1910) suggests a fifth stage of problem solving which is also required by the SWPPI and is that of making a judgment of the selected solution.

Analysis of Data

The data were analyzed in order to determine whether there was an association between amount of formal social work education completed and students' judgment of the degree of appropriateness of proposed solutions to problems on the SWPPI and to determine whether responses of students to the SWPPI were similar to those of experienced practitioners. The student groups were classified as (a) freshmen or sophomores who had completed one to one-third of the courses required for the baccalaureate degree, (b) juniors or seniors who had completed at least two-thirds of their courses, including not less than eight credit hours in a supervised practicum, or (c) graduate social work students who had completed no more than one year of graduate study. The practitioner group was composed of 16 individuals who had advanced professional degrees and extensive experience in helping roles. For each of the 26 SWPPI items, the proportions of the three student

groups indicating the degree of appropriateness of the problem solution were compared. *Chi-square* tests were used to determine whether the differences were statistically significant. *Chi-square* tests were also applied to the responses of the students and practitioners to determine if there were significant differences between their judgments of the appropriateness of the solutions to the SWPPI problems.

Table 1 presents the proportions of the student and practitioner groups rating the problem solutions as appropriate, partially appropriate, or inappropriate. An item-by-item comparison of the responses of the four groups was made and the probabilities associated with each *Chi-square* analysis are also reported in Table 1.

Table 1

Percentage of Students and Practitioners Indicating
The Degree of Appropriateness of Solutions to SWPPI Problems

Degree of Appropriateness	Group				χ^2
	Freshmen/ Sophomores (n=60)	Juniors/ Seniors (n=63)	Graduates (n=27)	Practitioners (n=16)	
	%	%	%	%	
Item 1					
Appropriate	37	33	18	19	4.99
Part Appropriate	35	30	41	44	
Inappropriate	28	37	41	37	
Item 2					
Appropriate	7	5	0	0	1.76
Part Appropriate	13	11	11	25	
Inappropriate	80	84	89	75	
Item 3					
Appropriate	88	84	93	94	2.63
Part Appropriate	12	13	7	6	
Inappropriate	0	3	0	0	
Item 4					
Appropriate	90	83	70	88	5.45
Part Appropriate	8	14	26	12	
Inappropriate	2	3	4	0	
Item 5					
Appropriate	44	29	52	69	13.28*
Part Appropriate	23	38	30	25	
Inappropriate	33	33	18	6	

(Continued)

Table 1 — *Continued*

Degree of Appropriateness	Group				χ^2
	Freshmen/ Sophomores (n=60)	Juniors/ Seniors (n=63)	Graduates (n=27)	Practitioners (n=16)	
	%	%	%	%	
Item 6					
Appropriate	58	56	56	69	1.31
Part Appropriate	22	22	26	19	
Inappropriate	20	22	18	12	
Item 7					
Appropriate	22	14	7	44	17.37**
Part Appropriate	18	13	11	31	
Inappropriate	60	73	82	25	
Item 8					
Appropriate	0	0	0	6	37.15***
Part Appropriate	7	5	0	44	
Inappropriate	93	95	100	50	
Item 9					
Appropriate	86	81	78	75	1.78
Part Appropriate	12	16	15	25	
Inappropriate	2	3	7	0	
Item 10					
Appropriate	70	49	41	25	25.28***
Part Appropriate	22	29	41	75	
Inappropriate	8	22	18	0	
Item 11					
Appropriate	66	65	67	44	4.18
Part Appropriate	22	21	15	31	
Inappropriate	12	14	18	25	
Item 12					
Appropriate	76	75	70	81	.73
Part Appropriate	22	22	26	19	
Inappropriate	2	3	4	0	
Item 13					
Appropriate	76	70	70	88	4.71
Part Appropriate	17	25	19	12	
Inappropriate	7	5	11	0	
Item 14					
Appropriate	58	49	44	13	17.62**
Part Appropriate	14	22	4	31	
Inappropriate	28	29	52	56	
Item 15					
Appropriate	60	37	15	25	36.30***
Part Appropriate	27	35	26	69	
Inappropriate	13	28	59	6	

(Continued)

Table 1 – *Continued*

Degree of Appropriateness	Group: Freshmen/ Sophomores (n=60)	Juniors/ Seniors (n=63	Graduates (n=27)	Practitioners (n=16)	χ^2
	%	%	%	%	
Item 16					
Appropriate	22	14	15	0	9.73
Part Appropriate	25	27	11	44	
Inappropriate	53	59	74	56	
Item 17					
Appropriate	80	85	77	88	1.40
Part Appropriate	18	13	15	12	
Inappropriate	2	2	8	0	
Item 18					
Appropriate	58	67	70	69	3.23
Part Appropriate	30	19	19	25	
Inappropriate	12	14	11	6	
Item 19					
Appropriate	4	5	15	81	73.71***
Part Appropriate	38	35	30	6	
Inappropriate	58	60	55	13	
Item 20					
Appropriate	70	79	92	100	10.48*
Part Appropriate	27	16	4	0	
Inappropriate	3	5	4	0	
Item 21					
Appropriate	42	43	44	31	9.95
Part Appropriate	38	32	30	69	
Inappropriate	20	25	26	0	
Item 22					
Appropriate	67	29	52	44	23.60***
Part Appropriate	18	35	26	50	
Inappropriate	15	36	27	6	
Item 23					
Appropriate	70	62	67	100	14.89*
Part Appropriate	17	24	33	0	
Inappropriate	13	14	0	0	
Item 24					
Appropriate	30	30	41	6	8.62
Part Appropriate	18	21	18	44	
Inappropriate	52	49	41	50	
Item 25					
Appropriate	57	62	67	88	5.59
Part Appropriate	25	22	22	6	
Inappropriate	18	16	11	6	

(Continued)

Table 1 — *Continued*

Degree of Appropriateness	Group				χ^2
	Freshmen/ Sophomores (n=60)	Juniors/ Seniors (n=63)	Graduates (n=27	Practitioners (n=16	
	%	%	%	%	
Item 26					
Appropriate	53	43	40	44	5.88
Part Appropriate	22	24	30	44	
Inappropriate	25	33	30	12	

Note: Percentages rounded to nearest whole number. Relative frequencies in adjoining cells were pooled when warranted for computation of chi-square.

* significant at or beyond .05.

** significant at or beyond .01.

*** significant at or beyond .001.

The data presented in Table 1 suggests that the students were in general agreement about the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the solutions to the SWPPI problems. The data also indicate that there was a substantial disagreement between the students and practitioners as to the appropriateness of the solutions in that the practitioners tended to rate many of the solutions as being relatively more appropriate than did the students.

The *chi-square* values reported in Table 1 reveal that for 10 of the 26 items there were statistically significant differences among the four groups. These differences were largely attributable to the practitioners' tendency to rate the solutions as being more appropriate than did the students. For 8 of the remaining 16 items where there were no statistically significant differences (items 2,6 13,17,18,21,25,26), the tendency of practitioners to see the problem solutions as being relatively more appropriate persisted.

In view of the observed tendency of students to be less accepting of the SWPPI solutions, information available from both the student and practitioner respondents was used to identify some of the factors that influenced their judgments about the relative appropriateness of the solutions. The students tended to agree that:

1. The SWPPI problem statements did not provide enough information for them to unequivocally endorse the proposed solutions.
2. There is an "ideal" solution for problems and that endorsement of a lesser solution is unacceptable.

3. Neither their didactic nor practicum experiences provided useable criteria for determining what actions would be considered appropriate in specific problem situations.

Information available from the practitioners indicated that:

1. A more detailed statement of the problem would not have greatly influenced their overall judgment of the relative appropriateness of the solution.
2. The information upon which decisions must be based is never, and cannot be, complete and that decisions must be made in the context of what is known or knowable about a given problem situation.
3. None of the solutions in the SWPPI are ideal, but based upon the information provided in the problem statements most of the proposed solutions, as interim actions, would not seriously compromise a useful solution.

The students' tendency to be more critical or less accepting of the solutions than were the practitioners appears to be due to the students' belief that there is an "ideal" solution to problems and that solutions which deviate from the ideal are to be rejected or, at best, considered to be only partially appropriate. The tendency of practitioners to be more accepting of the solutions appears to result from a belief that there are few ideal solutions to problems and that solutions which seem to be a compromise between the ideal and the achievable should be considered at least partially appropriate. In addition, experienced practitioners may be willing to accept solutions based on the information immediately available, while students are reluctant to do so. Students appear to need more complete information than do practitioners about a problem situation before they are willing to accept a solution as being appropriate.

A critical determinant in the observed differences between the student and practitioner groups may be due to the inability of students to transfer specific problem-solving skills to problem situations. This transfer is what Bruner (1961, p. 17) describes as "the specific applicability of learning to tasks that are highly similar to those a person originally learned to perform"; that is, the problems on the SWPPI were similar to ones the practitioners had learned to solve in their practice experiences whereas students had only limited experiences with problems similar to those posed by the SWPPI. The students may also have been at a disadvantage to the extent that problem-solving skills may not have been sufficiently stressed in their educational experiences or that they had little feedback from instructors about the adequacy of their problem-solving skills.

Summary and Discussion

The research suggests that (a) completion of either an undergraduate or graduate degree program in social work may contribute less to the problem-solving skills of the graduate than is generally believed, (b) the combined effect of didactic instruction and practicum experiences on the development of problem-solving skills may be less than is generally believed, (c) learning activities conducted under conditions that approximate those encountered in real-life practice situations are likely to be most effective, (d) educational experiences should provide students with criteria for decisions in problem situations in which the decisions and actions must be based on partial and selected information, and (e) students could increase their problem-solving ability by being provided with experiences which would help them in developing a search model for use in retrieving and mobilizing information gained from both experience and formal education.

In summary, the research indicates that there are important differences in the way social work students and practitioners perceive of and define appropriate problem-solving behaviors. This suggests that there may be a marked disparity between what educators believe students have learned and what they have actually learned. Further, the assessment of students' skills through the use of standardized instruments may provide useful information not provided by course grades and other traditional measures of skill attainment. There is, however, a continuing need to develop and refine a variety of instruments to assess the different skills needed for professional social work practice.

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APPENDIX

SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE PROBLEM-SOLVING INVENTORY

A modification of the Social Work Practice Problems Test
by Elizabeth L. Torre. By Permission

In your preparation to become a professional social worker and in your practice, you will encounter a continuing series of practice problems which will require decisions about possible solutions on your part. These decisions will point the way to the kinds of actions you will take in response to the demands of the problems.

The following Inventory consists of 26 items in which social work practice problem situations are described and a solution proposed. These problems have been rated by expert judgments as illustrative of the type and range of practice problems you are likely to encounter. All of the problems are fictitious.

The purpose of the Inventory is to gain information about the degree to which groups of social work students can discriminate among different levels of appropriateness of social work problem-solving actions.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Please read each item carefully, identifying for yourself the facts in the problem that seem most pertinent to you in deciding upon a solution to the problem.

2. Read carefully the solution given for each problem and make a decision about the quality of the solution in terms of its degree of appropriateness or inappropriateness.

3. After you have read each problem and solution you are to place an "X" on the Answer Sheet under the heading which you feel best describes the degree of appropriateness of the worker's behavior. For example, if you feel that the worker's actions reported in the solution were quite appropriate, you would place an "X" on the answer sheet under the heading "Appropriate." If you feel the solution is at least partially appropriate, you would place an "X" on the answer sheet under the heading "Partially Appropriate." If you feel that the solution was an essentially inappropriate action, you would place an "X" under the heading "Inappropriate."

YOU ARE TO USE YOUR OWN JUDGMENT AS TO WHICH FACTORS NEED TO BE CONSIDERED IN ARRIVING AT YOUR DECISION OF THE DEGREE OF APPROPRIATENESS OF THE PROBLEM SOLUTION.

PLEASE RESPOND TO ALL ITEMS.

SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE PROBLEMS INVENTORY

1. **Problem:** You are the worker for Mrs. Johnson, a forty-four year old grandmother, who receives child support for two out-of-wedlock children born to her daughter that she is raising. The children are boys, ages 4 and 7. Mrs. Johnson has three teen-age children of her own still living in the home that are not covered by the assistance grant. She supports herself and them by doing maid's work. Her own mother also lives in the household and has been taking care of the young children, while Mrs. Johnson goes to work. However, her mother wants to move out-of-town to live with a sister, who has recently been widowed.

   Mrs. Johnson now has the problem of finding other suitable care for the younger children of her daughter, so that she can continue working to support herself and her three children. Her situation is complicated by the fact that the seven year old boy is retarded and not in school, because there is no place in the special classes in the public school for him. There are also no facilities in the neighborhood that provide day care for retarded children. You may be able to arrange to have the child placed in an institution, but Mrs. Johnson is very resistant to this solution.

   Solution: First, you are going to find out where the daughter is, who is the mother of the two boys, ages 4 and 7, and see if she can help in any way. Then you are going to explore with the grandmother the possibility of moving to a neighborhood where the resources are available. If she resists this idea and the daughter can give no help; you will have to point out to your client what the reality of her situation is, that she will either have to place the child or discontinue her work and rely on public assistance.

2. **Problem:** You are working in a group with several children from Class 4-B in an elementary school in the neighborhood where your field unit is located. They were referred to you by the teacher as children who were behavior problems in the class. Mrs. Jones, the classroom teacher, with whom you had close contact in forming the group, asks you how several children are getting along in the group.

   Solution: Even though the teacher has helped you form the group, you feel it would be a violation of client confidentiality to discuss with her the progress of the children in the group. You, therefore, explain to her that you cannot give her any information about the children's behavior in the group. However, you let her know that you would be appreciative of her passing along to you any additional insights she may have about these children from further observing their classroom behavior.

3. **Problem:** You are starting work with a family referred by the Visiting Teacher Service. The reason for the referral is that Tommy, age 8, is a slow learner and shows hyperactive behavior in the classroom, which is difficult to manage. In your first interviews with the mother, which you have to hold on Saturday morning, because the mother works, you find out that this is a broken home; that there is very little organization about when and how things are done; and that there is a younger boy, whom the mother seems to favor. At this point you are trying to understand factors contributing to Tommy's behavior.

   Solution: You recognize that you need to gather information about both possible psycho-social factors and physical factors contributing to Tommy's behavior problem, and you seek to enlist the mother's help in this exploration. You want to find out if his slow learning performance could be due in part to low I.Q. and/or medical difficulties. You, therefore, plan to ask the mother when he last had a general health examination and talk with her about arranging for a current one, if the date seems too far distant. You also arrange through the school for Tommy to have a series of psychological tests.

In your next interviews with the mother you are interested in gathering more information about the home situation, as it relates to Tommy's behavior. You plan to talk further with the mother concerning her feeling for both Tommy and the younger child and the circumstances of the father's leaving the home with its effect on family members. You may want to continue to build a relationship with the mother, so that she may later be able to use suggestions about home and child management, based on a shared assessment with you of Tommy's difficulty.

4. **Problem:** You have been assigned to work with the Mitchells, a fairly well motivated family, consisting of the husband and wife and three school age children. Mr. Mitchell was employed as a roofer until several months ago, when he suffered an on-the-job injury, which caused him to lose a leg. This qualified him for temporary disability. The family had never before received public assistance. The mother has never worked outside the home. Your problem is to select some sort of social work intervention that might help restore this family to independent functioning.

Solution: You decide that since Mr. Mitchell is a well motivated man and has supported himself and his family successfully prior to his accident, you should recommend him for vocational rehabilitation training. You also see no reason why Mrs. Mitchell shouldn't be encouraged to seek part-time employment during school hours. Because this crisis situation has brought about some changes for every member of the family, you plan to work with Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell and their children as a family unit during this period of readjustment, eliciting their feelings about it and supporting their efforts to return to independent functioning.

5. **Problem:** Your client is a 35 year old woman, the mother of four children. She recently qualified for an AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) grant because her husband deserted. When you entered the case, her major complaints were about her health. She said she had trouble sleeping, was tired all the time, and had frequent stomach upsets accompanied by vomiting. You arranged for her to get a complete physical examination at Charity Hospital Clinic. The medical report revealed no significant physical findings that might account for her symptoms. You hypothesize that they might be in part related to her difficulties that began with her husband's desertion. You tell her that you would like to talk with her a few more times to see if together you can discover the trouble. She agreed to continue seeing you.

Solution: You decide that at your next interview you will encourage her to talk about how lonely she must feel since her husband left her and how difficult she must find it to be responsible alone for caring for four children. You hope that by helping her to express these feelings and being understanding of them yourself, you may in time also get her to verbalize some of her angry feelings about being deserted. Then you may help her connect the lonliness and anger, which appear to be the major causative factors, with her physical complaints.

6. **Problem:** You have been assigned as an observer to an interdisciplinary planning committee for a community center to be located in a public housing project in the neighborhood where your field unit is placed. This committee meets monthly and this is the third time you have attended. Your field instructor has asked you to pay particular attention to what role your field unit might play in giving service to tenants through the community center program.

The housing project has apartments for facilities and a high rise building with apartments for elderly persons. At this meeting the group is discussing the fact that aged persons often need help with their declaration for old age assistance. Someone has suggested that this help be made available in the community

center. You feel here is something members of your student unit might do.

Solution: First you listen to hear what other ideas are discussed in the meeting and say nothing in the formal session. Afterwards you seek out and speak to the person or persons responsible for planning in this area and indicate to them your feeling that your unit might be of possible help here. However, you make it quite clear that you will first have to discuss the idea with your unit and field instructor, for you yourself cannot commit the students. You say you will do this at your next field unit meeting and will report the outcome. You also find out if this person or persons would be able to meet with your unit to explore this idea further, if you find considerable interest and enthusiasm among your fellow students.

7. **Problem:** You are the worker with a group of elementary school age foster children, boys and girls, ranging in age from seven to eleven, who live together in a group residence. Today for a crafts activity you are making big cut-out Santas for Christmas. The directions you have suggest making the buttons on Santa's coat out of colored cardboard or jelly beans. They also suggest that instead of cotton you might substitute a marshmallow for the round white ball at the end of his cap.

Solution: In spite of the fact that most children like candy, you choose the cardboard and cotton materials. From a practical point of view these materials seem best to you: because the children would probably prefer eating the candy to doing the crafts project, and it might not get done. On a different level it has occurred to you that food, particularly candy, is likely to be viewed by these emotionally, and probably materially, deprived children as something precious and not to be used for decoration.

8. **Problem:** All semester you have been seeing on an individual basis two students in the elementary school in the neighborhood where your field unit is located. You have been using a small conference room off the main school office for your interviews. Generally, you have found the school principal most cooperative, as have other students in your unit who work in this school.

Today you are a bit early and happen to walk in when the principal is beating a student with a ruler. You are horrified and know this is against the law.

Solution: You pretend you didn't see it and decide to do nothing on the basis that you're a guest in the school. Although you know the action is illegal, you feel it is not your business to interfere in the principal's operation of the school. Also you fear that, if you say anything, you might jeopardize the relationships of your training center with this school.

9. **Problem:** You have been working with the Adams family. The father is a fruit harvester and is away for long periods of time. The mother has been ill off and on since the last baby was born. She frequently has trouble making ends meet, but the family does not qualify for public assistance. There are five children in the family, ranging in age from four months to eleven, three girls and two boys. You receive a call from the mother that Johnny, the eleven year old, has been arrested by the police and is being held at the local juvenile detention center. She thinks it is for stealing, but she is not sure. The mother is very excited on the phone and she wants to know if you can do something right away.

Solution: Initially, in your phone conversation, you try to calm the mother down by telling her you will help her find out what happened. Then, because an immediate response is indicated, you make arrangements to take her as soon as possible to the Juvenile Detention Center to get accurate information about the situation. Once there you plan to inquire if Johnny can be released, and if not, then find out what is to be done. You will also try to talk with Johnny at the earliest opportunity to hear what he has to say.

10. **Problem:** In the housing project in the neighborhood where your field unit is placed, are a number of mothers who are concerned about a summer program for their school age children. Many of the mothers are employed, but do not have adequate funds to provide supervision for their children. While in some families there are older adults or siblings to provide some supervision, it is felt that this is inadequate to capture the interestof the children or to give them direction. The concern of the mothers is that their children might become involved in delinquent behavior.

Your field instructor has asked you to meet with these women in order to give them help with this problem they have identified.

Solution: This field assignment strikes you as an excellent opportunity for you to do a small community research project and give clients special individual attention at the same time. Prior to your meeting with the mothers you do two things: You begin finding out what summer recreation programs exist in the city, which these mothers could use for their children. You make up a questionnaire for each mother to fill out, giving you such information as the number of children in her family, their ages, the hours she works, and what fees she could pay, if any, for a summer program.

At the meeting you are going to explain to the mothers that you will use the questionnaires to help you make an individual plan for each family in terms of their expressed needs and community resources available to meet these needs. You are also going to let them know that you will personally visit each one of them after you have completed your study to discuss your suggested plan and help them implement it, if they desire.

11. **Problem:** You are meeting with an interfaith church group who thinks it wants to sponsor black-white dialogues to improve communication and understanding between the two races. Your assigned role is that of a resource person. Prior to the meeting you have collected information about how other groups have handled a similar subject: namely, they have had a supper, to allow people to become acquainted in an informal way, followed by discussion; or they have met in a comfortable place and after a brief introductory statement from each participant about their interest in attending, have moved right into the discussion. You tell the group your findings. The chairman of the group asks for discussion. After several members of the group have emphatically stated their preference for the plan where people get to the discussion of issues as rapidly as possible, a group member who has not yet spoken asks you directly what you think they should do.

Solution: Although your role is that of a resource person, you are also a professional who has researched this question. Therefore, you decide since you have been asked directly, you should state your preference. However, you feel you should tell the group it is their decision to make and again point out pros and cons of both methods.

12. **Problem:** You are the worker with a group of girls, eight and nine years old. You meet once a week in a neighborhood center. The girls are from a poverty area and were recruited from families who had recently moved into the neighborhood. Your purpose has been to help them with the problems of being new to the neighborhood and with age appropriate developmental tasks. They see the group as a place to make friends and have fun.

Initially, a number of members were shy, seemed to cling to you, and were reluctant to play with other group members. However, you have been meeting for ten weeks, and most are now interacting freely with one another. Emily continues to be a problem to you. She always asks you for candy as soon as she comes to

the meeting. She tries to stay by your side most of the time. She likes to hold your hand and on several occasions has climbed into your lap. She joins in group activities only after much urging, and sometimes flatly refuses to participate.

Solution: You feel that Emily probably does not receive the attention she needs at home. You decide that you will not carry candy or encourage her clinging behavior. However, you don't want to ignore her either, when she so obviously wants to be cared for. Therefore, you are going to try to enlist the aid of some of the other girls in helping you pay attention to her and get her involved in activities. You are also going to be on the look out for any special kinds of jobs you might assign her, that would involve her more in group activities. You are also going to be alert to praising any independent behavior she shows. You hope that such a series of actions will begin to meet her individual needs for affection and love.

13. **Problem**: You have been working with Don, age 10, on an individual basis for four months. He was referred to you originally because of a temporary school suspension for fighting and general disruptive behavior. During this time he has improved in his attitude toward school, although he has yet to make any real progress in his academic achievement.

One afternoon, that is not your regular time to see him, he comes to your field unit and says he wants to talk with you. He has never done this before, and there seems to be something urgent in his manner; so you find a place where you can talk together. He says he came to tell you he is going to run away from home.

Solution: You interpret his coming to you as a sign that he wants help and that he feels two ways about running away, he both wants to and he doesn't want to. You try to calmly talk with him, first finding out what has happened to make him decide to run away. You focus on his feelings concerning his problems and try to be sympathetic. Then you try to have him see other ways of handling his problems that do not involve running away, stressing the fact that the consequences of not running away are really more desirable. When you are fairly sure he no longer intends to carry out his plan, you terminate the interview, letting him know that he did the right thing in coming to talk with you and should do so again, if he feels very troubled about something. You plan to keep in close contact with his home for a few days.

14. **Problem**: You have been working for six weeks with a group of oldsters in a municipal home for the aged. Your group includes both men and women. They are in the home because varying degrees of infirmity have made it impossible for them to live alone or in a family without special care. Some are in wheel chairs; some have poor eyesight; others have poor use of their hands. A few seem quite cheerful; but the majority feel lonely and neglected and often vie with one another for your attention.

You are trying to select some games to play at a Christmas party you are having with them. They have asked you to surprise them and think up something with prizes that will be fun. You are debating between a version of "go fishing", where each person gets a chance to fish for something in Santa's sack, or charades, where each person has to act out the title of a well-known Christmas carol and receives a prize if the rest of the group can't guess the title within three guesses.

Solution: You decide to choose charades. You feel this game will give members an opportunity to act out their needs for attention and to receive group recognition for their abilities. It has possibilities for laughter and enjoyment and should stimulate more group interaction than "go fishing", which puts very little demands,

physical or mental on participants. You also feel that a chance to forget their own situation and to become someone else should be beneficial to these people with their infirmities and troubles. After all, part of the reason for having the party is to help them forget their troubles and get in the holiday spirit!

15. **Problem:** You are working with Mrs. Morris. One of her children, Tom, has been having extreme learning problems in school. He had to stay back a year in second grade and now it looks as if he may have to repeat the third grade. You have arranged for him to be tested by the school board psychologist.

When you talked with Mrs. Morris about the testings, she behaved as if she were eager to have it done. You explained to her that the results could help her and the school make a better educational plan for Tom. You were very careful to explain to her, also, how important it was to keep the appointment because of the long waiting list of children to be tested and the difficulty in securing another appointment right away. She seemed to understand this. You made sure she knew where to go and for what time.

Therefore, you are very surprised to be notified today by the school counseling and testing service that Mrs. Morris and Tom failed to keep their appointment. You call Mrs. Morris to find out what happened, and she tells you she couldn't make it that day, and she's not so sure it would do any good to have Tom tested anyway.

Solution: You tell Mrs. Morris that at your next interview time, you would like to talk with her further about the testing. You intend to point out to her how necessary it is to have Tom tested and try to have her see that this is one way in which she, as the mother, can help her child. You are then going to make another appointment for the boy and offer to take Mrs. Morris and Tom personally to the testing center for the appointment.

16. **Problem:** You have been assigned to work with the Wilson Family. In the first interviews the mother tells you that the problem in the family is 14 year old Johnny. He's away from home a lot and never lets her know where he's going. When she tried to find out from him, they get into an argument, and he leaves anyway—angry. She thinks he's probably getting into some kind of trouble. She complains that she gets little help with Johnny from her husband. He works as an inter-state truck driver and is away for several weeks at a time, leaving her along to manage the children.

Mrs. Wilson wishes Johnny were more like Sam, the eight year old in the family. She describes Sam as a well-behaved child, who is content to stay home. She never has to worry about where he is. In fact, Sam is such good company for her, that she really misses him when he's at school. Frequently he helps her around the house. Sometimes, she says, he would rather stay home with her than go to school; but she assures you she makes him attend school.

Solution: On the basis that one should start where the client is, you agree with the mother that the major problem in the family at this time seems to be Johnny. Therefore, you are going to stop seeing the mother for the time being and work with Johnny on an individual basis. You suggest to the mother that Johnny be present at your next scheduled interview with her, so that the three of you may discuss this new plan. After that you will begin meeting with Johnny weekly. You are going to propose that the appointments with Johnny be in your training center office; because you feel that since he is having difficulty in his relationships at home, it would be better to have your interviews with him on a more neutral ground.

17. **Problem**: You have been assigned as the worker for an group of sixth grade boys in an elementary school. The purpose of the group is to facilitate the transition from elementary to junior high school for these students by preparatory discussions with them of some of the difficulties they may encounter in making the transition. The group was selected by the teachers from the sixth grade classes in consultation with you. The major criteria for selecting group members was assured promotion from the sixth grade. It is a short term group, planned for six to eight sessions, and will meet in the school on a once-a-week basis.

Today is the first group meeting. Prior to the meeting the principal and teachers have told the boys about the group, and you have had an opportunity to speak briefly with each of them also about it. They come in and are seated with some shuffling of chairs and talking to one another. You introduce yourself, and one boy aggressively asks, "What are we here for anyway"?

Solution: You feel that the aggressive tone of this boy's question stems from his anxiety about what is going to happen to him in the group. You think others may also be feeling the same way, so you ask the whole group if they have similar questions. Then you try to find out from the group members what they have understood about the group from talking with their principal and teachers and with you prior to this first meeting and what they expect will happen in it. You ask them, too, what they would like to happen. You correct any expectations you feel cannot be met in the group. In this way you hope to clarify the group purpose with the boys, so that you and they may arrive at a shared understanding of what it is.

18. **Problem**: You are assigned to a field unit with seven other first year students. You meet weekly with your field instructor in a group seminar. For the last two weeks most of the seminar has been concerned with problems of setting limits, several of your unit members are having with their children's groups. You are not having this problem. Rather your major practice concern is with a client family, in which a teen-age boy has recently been arrested for stealing a car. Consequently you have been both bored and frustrated in the seminar, and you are beginning to feel the sessions are a waste of your time.

Solution: First, you examine why you are bored and question your lack of interest in the topic, in view of the fact that setting limits is a problem, not only in groups, but one that can occur in many relationships. You think back over the discussion to recall and sort out what general points have been mentioned that might be useful to you in the future in a possible similar situation. You then decide that if the discussions on the topic continue into another week, you will bring up your feelings in the group seminar and ask your group and field instructor to help you with practice matters of concern to you at this time.

19. **Problem**: You are the worker with a group of ten and eleven year old girls. The overall purpose of the group is to help the girls master more successful ways of getting along with one another, that will have carry-over to their ways of relating to others at home, at school, and in the neighborhood. This is your fourth meeting. Mary, who has had some trouble making friends in the group brings two younger friends, who are not group members to the meeting with her. She says they are going to join the group.

Solution: You tell Mary and the two girls that they cannot join. You explain that Mary's friends are too young for the group, and besides the whole group must vote on new members. You allow them to stay for this meeting, because they are already there, and you also think it would be good for diagnostic purposes to observe Mary's interaction with these two younger girls.

20. **Problem**: You have been placed in a field unit which has been newly located in a poverty neighborhood. Your field instructor tells the unit that one of your first jobs together will be gathering information about the life

style of the neighborhood in order to plan services you might offer. In discussion you decide that you should collect information about the needs and resources of the neighborhood in order to identify problem areas and gaps in resources. Your field instructor then asks the unit for suggestions about how and where to begin this exploration.

Solution: You wonder what information about neighborhood needs and resources has already been collected and would be available for your use. Therefore, you suggest as a logical series of first steps that your unit locate and check current census data; find out what social welfare agencies already exist in the neighborhood and what they do; and talk to a sample of community leaders and residents to get their views about needs in the area.

21. **Problem**: You are the worker with a group of twelve year old girls. You observe that Cathy has now been absent for two meetings, and you ask the group if they know anything about why she hadn't been coming. Ella Mae says she has talked to her, and that they have made up since they had their fight in the group. Janie says, however, that Cathy told her at school that her mother wouldn't let her come back to the group, because of the whole affair. You aren't completely sure what the fight was about, but you do remember Ella Mae said something undetermined to Cathy, after which they threatened each other back and forth with the majority of the group joing Ella Mae. Then Cathy began to cry. You thought you had settled it by comforting Cathy and letting the group know they were not to gang up against another member.

Solution: You know that twelve year old girls are subject to "blow ups" and that they also may over react to them. You feel that the group, not just Ella Mae, should invite Cathy back. If she doesn't come to the next meeting, you intend to talk with the others about this, as well as touching again on what can happen when a majority of the group gangs up against another member. You doubt that the mother is really keeping Cathy home, so you plan to do nothing at that moment about contacting her. However, if it later turns out the mother is a part of the problem, you will make a home visit to talk with her.

22. **Problem**: You have been working with Mrs. White, a resident in the public housing project in the neighborhood where your field unit is located. She was referred to your unit initially by a local minister, who thought her two school children would benefit from group services. As a result, of this referral, a student from your unit, who now has these two children in her group, became acquainted with the mother. When Mrs. White requested help with some other problems she was having, you were assigned to see her on a weekly basis.

This week, when you had your interview together in her apartment, you noticed huge sores on the legs of her four year old, Ann. When you questioned Mrs. White about the sores, she said they were rat bites, and that a lot of children in the project had them. She insisted that housing knew about this problem and wouldn't do anything. You feel that something should be done.

Solution: You first report this to your field instructor and then plan to bring it up for discussion in your field seminar to see, if other students in your unit have run into the same problem. Prior to your field seminar you also check the health and sanitation regulations applying to the housing project. In this way you hope to be able to present your fellow students with some facts about the matter and to enlist their interest and aid in helping you decide on a series of next appropriate steps.

23. **Problem**: You are the group leader in a club of nine year old boys, with whom you meet weekly in a neighborhood church recreation room. You are interested in helping them improve their physical skills and their skills in relating to one another and to adult authority figures.

You have just held your fifth meeting. You feel that it went badly from beginning to end. The boys fought over the refreshments; they couldn't agree on who would be captains of the two teams for football, so the game never really got started; and Larry left announcing that he wasn't coming back to the group. You feel defeated and at a loss to know how to handle the group at your next meeting. How are you going to go about getting some help with this problem before your next group meeting.

Solution: You first think through the meeting carefully by recording what happened and your own ideas about why you think it happened. You try to do some reading about group process and developmental level of latency boys to decide whether you think the activity of football was a good choice. Having done as much on your own as you can, you then seek help in your field seminar discussions from your field instructor and from fellow students in the unit, particularly from ones who are working with similar groups.

24. **Problem**: As a part of your preparation for direct service giving to families and children, you and the other students in your field unit are having a series of experiences with children of all ages, in which you are to assume a limited helping role.

You have been assigned to assist with playground duty at a school in the neighborhood where your field unit is located. It is a racially mixed school. This week you are helping to supervise the five year old kindergarten children. One black child, Bobby, has particularly caught your attention, because unlike the other black children in the class, he wears an Afro hair cut and is dressed in Afro garb. As you watch him, you notice he moves back and forth from playing with other children to playing by himself, as if undecided about which to do. Then he comes up and strokes the long blond hair of a little white girl, who is waiting her turn to jump rope. Bobby looks troubled.

Solution: Your opinion is that basically this interchange is normal childhood behavior, and you decide to do nothing. After all little boys often tease little girls by pulling their hair and when they do little girls usually pull away. You feel the children have managed the situation quite well and to interfere on the basis of race would be attributing a significance to their action that doesn't exist.

25. **Problem**: You are the worker with a group of ten and eleven year old boys. Several times recently you have had art activities—clay and painting. You have used an unstructured method, allowing the boys to create with the materials whatever they liked. Each time several of the boys, not always the same ones, have painted or modeled nude figures and whispered and giggled over them. They have alternated between putting them where you could see them and covering them over with paint or destroying them when you came near.

So far you have ignored this behaivor; but it seems likely to be repeated, if you continue to have art activities.

Solution: You feel that this behavior is fairly typical of boys this age. They don't know what sex is all about and want to know. At the same time they want to pretend, especially to peers, that they do know. Therefore, you are going to have another art activity period very soon and this time pick up on their hints to you to talk about sex. In this manner you plan to use their behavior as a good opportunity to respond naturally and with factual information to their age appropriate curiosity.

26. **Problem**: You are working with a parents' group in an elementary school located in a poverty area. One purpose of the group is to increase understanding and communication between the home and the school. A persistent theme has been complaints about how the school is always sending home notes asking for money for costumes for the play, for damaged books, to see a movie, to go on a trip, and so forth. The parents say they are made to feel inadequate, if they don't send the money; but often they don't have it to send.

One member suggests the group invite the school principal to one of their meetings and tell her their feelings. She asks the group to vote on her suggestion. You sense the suggestion is premature and that there are several women who might be threatened by such a discussion with the principal at this time.

Solution: You decide to use your authority as the group leader and tell the group the suggestion may indeed be a good way of approaching the problem, but you think it needs more discussion before you take a vote. You propose that all the members think about what it wants to do. In the meantime you plan to sound the principal out on how she feels about some of the issues to get an idea of how she might respond, if invited to the group.